



The Ice Age National Scenic Trail

A trail to explore the glacial landscape



A profusion of wildflowers colors the landscape in this sand prairie found along the Ice Age Trail in the Kettle Moraine country of Waukesha County.

Imagine a public greenway meandering across Wisconsin's glacial landscape. Imagine a trail 1,200 miles long leading both to places of glacial beauty close to home and to some of the remotest parts of Wisconsin.



Ray Zilmer

That is what the late Ray Zilmer of Milwaukee had in mind in the 1950s when he proposed that an Ice Age Glacier National Forest Park be established along the entire length of the moraines marking the furthest advance of the last glacier in Wisconsin. An avid hiker, he proposed a continuous footpath, similar to the Appalachian Trail, as the central feature of the park so that visitors could explore and enjoy the glacial landscape at their own pace.

In 1958, the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation was established by a group of Wisconsin citizens to promote the creation of the national glacial park. As the effort to win Congressional authorization of the park gained momentum, volunteers were already at work building the first segments of the future Ice Age Trail in the Kettle Moraine State Forest.

The result of these efforts was the creation, in 1971, of the nine-unit Ice Age National Scientific Reserve to be administered by the State of Wisconsin in cooperation with, and with assistance from, the National Park Service. While the none Reserve units contain only portions of the glacial park proposed by Zilmer, the Federal legislation authorizing the Reserve specifically recognized the efforts of the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation to create a continuous footpath linking these areas, but offered no Federal assistance.



This illustration shows the extent of the ice sheet in Wisconsin during the last glaciation.



The route of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail generally follows the moraines left when the glacier retreated.



The sandstone Buttes of Mill Bluff in Monroe County were former islands in Glacial Lake Wisconsin.



The Kettle Moraine Reserve Unit includes both prairie savanna habitat and kettle lakes.

The Nine Units of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve:

- Two Creeks Buried Forest
- Kettle Moraine
- Campbellsport Drumlins
- Horicon Marsh
- Cross Plains
- Devil's Lake
- Mill Bluff
- Chippewa Moraine
- Interstate



A kettle lake in the Chippewa Moraine reflects an autumn sky.



Volunteers use hand tools to build the trail.



North of Lodi, the Ice Age Trail crosses the Wisconsin River on the only ferry still operated by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation,



The route of the Ice Age Trail is marked with yellow blazes.



The trail's official logo features a woolly mammoth, one of the animals that lived in Wisconsin during the Ice Age.

In 1975, efforts to establish the trail accelerated across the State. In a few years, volunteers were successful in establishing major segments of the trail. Congress recognized the national significance of the trail and the efforts to establish it in October 1980 by designating it a National Scenic Trail (NST). The National Park Service administers the trail in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation. There are also many other partners that participate in the trail by developing and managing specific segments, including the U.S. Forest Service; county and municipal park and forestry departments; conservation, civic and youth organizations; and private volunteers and landowners.

Changing land uses along the trail route and increasing development pressure made it obvious by the mid-1980's that a permanent right-of-way for the trail needed to be preserved. Consequently, the foundation began purchasing trail lands in 1986

with privately donated funds. The Wisconsin legislature also responded to the need to protect the trail by designating it Wisconsin's first State Scenic Trail in 1987. Three years later, the legislature enacted the Stewardship Program, a fund from which monies are available to assist in acquiring lands for the Ice Age Trail. The National Park Service, through its administrative authorities for the trail, leads the effort to plan the permanent route of the trail and provides technical and limited financial assistance to cooperating partners.

Today, approximately 300 miles of the trail have been certified by the National Park Service as part of the Ice Age NST. Certification indicated the segment is developed and managed in accordance with approved trail plans and entitles the segment to be marked with the official trail emblem. An additional 250 miles of completed trail segments are also open for public use and enjoyment.



An Ice Age Trail interpretive sign at the West Bluff overlook in Devil's Lake State Park.